

PRIVATE HARRY TOON (14853)
1895 – Nov 15th 1915
9TH BATTALION, LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT



BY SAMUEL T STEWART – AUGUST 2020

THE FRONT COVER IMAGES

The original “Lord Kitchener Wants You” poster was a 1914 advertisement by Alfred Leete which was developed into a recruitment poster. It depicted Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War. Above the words “YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU”. Kitchener, wearing the cap of a British Field Marshal, stares and points at the viewer calling them to enlist in the British Army against the Central Powers. The image is considered one of the most iconic and enduring images of World War I.

BRITISH ARMY STATISTICS

At the beginning of 1914, the British Army had a reported strength of 710,000 men including reserves, of which around 80,000 were regular troops ready for war. By the end of the First World War almost 1 in 4 of the total male population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland had joined up, over five million men. Of these men, 2.67 million joined as volunteers and 2.77 million as conscripts (although some volunteered after conscription was introduced and would most likely have been conscripted anyway).

HARRY TOON

The following has been researched and cross-checked from numerous sources such as censuses, newspaper reports, military records, commonwealth war graves commission records etc. There are some conflicting reports, but the author has endeavoured to provide information from reliable sources only:-

Ages given are taken from the 1911 census

Little did Thomas (45) and Annie (40) Toon know the future tragedy that was to befall them after they moved to Griffydam sometime between 1901 and 1911 with their five sons Harry (16), Maurice (12), Thomas (10), John (9) and Fred (8) to live in one of the last cottages at the end of Elder Lane where it meets the Rempstone Road. Thomas and Annie were born in Melbourne and Newbold respectively and all the sons were born in Worthington. Harry is shown on the 1911 census as a “Clay Worker - Pipe Works – Earthenware” (presumably at The Lount Brick and Sanitary Pipe Company, Newbold), but various reports suggest he subsequently worked at Coleorton Colliery (Bug & Wink).

Harry was one of the volunteers that joined Kitchener’s Army in 1914 at the young age of 19. He joined the 9th Battalion Leicestershire regiment (service number 14853) which was raised at Leicester in September 1914 as part of Kitchener’s third new army (K3). The 9th Battalion Leicestershire regiment joined the 23rd division as divisional troops. In April 1915 they transferred to the 11th brigade, 39th division and proceeded to France on the 29th of July 1915. The division apparently concentrated on the fighting near Tilques.



It was only just over 18 weeks after the regiment arrived in France that Thomas and Annie received the devastating news that their son had been killed in battle. There follows a report from the Coalville Times:-

Coalville Times – Friday December 3rd 1915

GRIFFYDAM SOLDIER KILLED –A FORMER MINER AT COLEORTON COLLIERY (*BUG & WINK*)

Mr & Mrs. Thomas Toon, of Griffydam, have received information that their son, Private Harry Toon (14853), 16th Platoon, D. Company, 9th Leicestershire Regiment, has been killed in action at a place not stated. The sad news was first received in a letter from Second-Lieutenant. V. W. Sheldon, who states that Toon was killed on November 15th. Private Toon was aged 20, and resided with his parents at Griffydam and worked at Coleorton Colliery. He and his two pals, Privates C. Platts and S. Johnson, enlisted at Coleorton Hall, on September 5th, 1914, and after training in various camps in England, landed “somewhere in France” on July 29th last.

THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

There is a record of Harry Toon's death on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website and he is listed as being buried at **BEINVILLERS MILITARY CEMETERY** – Grave reference - I. A.71. Toon is misspelt as Toone in their records and on his gravestone



Bienvillers Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France



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Bienvillers Military Cemetery, France

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MEMORIAL PLAQUE IN ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH WORTHINGTON



Harry Toon's name is marked by red dots.